

The Cost of Discipleship

Jonathan K. Dodson | Luke 14:12-35 | February 2, 2015

We're looking at the church, the theater of the gospel, and we've seen the important roles Sunday gatherings and City Groups or community play. But none of that—church—will really make sense unless we know who we are, who Jesus calls anyone to be—a disciple. It's not a word we use much today, but a disciple is a learner, follower, imitator of Christ. A disciple is *not* a Christian who makes a bigger commitment to Christianity. You can't make a bigger commitment than to *Jesus Christ as Lord*. In Luke 14, Jesus explains what it means to follow him, to be his disciple. He's very straight forward when he confronts *costly excuses* with *costly grace* for *costly discipleship*. We'll take a good look at each of these, but before we do, I want to challenge you to *not make this sermon about someone else, somebody else's comfort or cost—me, your friend, your spouse, your city group. Make this sermon about you and Jesus. Christ is here, and he wants to speak to you.*

Costly Excuses

Jesus tells those he is sitting with how to really throw a party, not inviting so they would be invited back, giving preference to the marginalized (13-14). A religious leader says: "**Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!**" (15) To which Jesus responds, "But," and then tells a parable. Now, what's there to challenge in the religious person's statement? It looks pretty orthodox—everyone who eats in the kingdom of God will be happy. It's not *what* he says that's wrong, it's *what he assumes*—a place in the kingdom of God. Just because you're religious, because you go to church, and sit with Jesus at dinner, doesn't mean we'll sit with him in the kingdom of God. Jesus picks up on this smug self-righteousness and essentially says, "*Now that you mention it, let me tell you what it costs to eat bread in the kingdom. It'll cost you your excuses.*" And then he tells a kingdom parable about a Great Banquet. Preparations are set, invitations sent, and the excuses begin to roll in. First, "**I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused**" (18). So the greatest banquet ever is set, and you can't come because you bought a field? *Possessions*. I can't go to church because I just got a new car, a new house, new furniture, new computer and I want to *look* at it. Really? *God, the sovereign supplier of all things good, true and beautiful, has invited you to a banquet and you can't wait to look at your new toy? If your possessions hold you back from church, then you're the one who's possessed.* And if your possessions own your affections, do you think you're going to follow Jesus when things really get tough? The talons of materialism are in deep. Second excuse, "**I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused**" (19). This is a considerable purchase. Two oxen were required for 50 acres, the average land ownership; so five oxen were for about 250 acres. It's a big deal. This is his livelihood, his job. I'm launching a new site, closing a big deal, got a new job and I just can't make it to City Group, serve the poor, feast with Jesus in meditation and prayer. You can see the oxen any time, but you're going to give work priority, over Christ and his kingdom? *[Complicated relationship between work and faith. Requires nuance. But most of us need aren't overdoing the integration.]* The buyer's excuse is that he needs to "examine" the oxen. The last excuse was just "to see" the field, but now it's more intense. He must take a closer look. The pull is strong, the job urgent, his heart enthralled with work but not with Christ. But the problem

isn't the demand of work; it's a disordered heart. The final excuse: "[I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come](#)" (20). Family. Relationships. I'm a newly wed so I clearly don't have time worship God or participate actively in Christian community. I'm dating and need to prioritize him or her. I have a new baby and her schedule is really important. You literally can't break away, or bring those relationships into the most epic banquet ever? If you got an invitation to the Academy awards, I bet you'd drop everything to go. Or if you were given a ticket to see Jack White, you'd suddenly reschedule your whole week. But the King of Creation, throwing an epic party, nah. I'm too busy. Other people more important. **There are always relationship demands that, if never denied, will result in distance from the most important relationship of all.** This excuse is the harshest. We dig our heels when it comes to family, "I cannot come." Cannot or will not? Jesus paints a progressive, gradual descent into a banquet of idolatry. Prizing possessions, work, and family above the chief reward of himself. Ordinary loves have become extraordinary idols. A disordered heart. The Master isn't indifferent; he's angry, and should be. Think of how upset you've been when you threw a party and not many people showed up. Now multiply that by eternity and put the most famous, most glorious, most gracious Host at the center. These are costly excuses. They calcify the heart and cost you the banquet of heaven. Jesus says, "[For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet](#)" (24). He does not move the date or change the Evite; the party is coming and only the willing will attend. Costly excuses could cost you everything.

Costly Discipleship

Now, in consumer Christianity, we're tempted to soften the consequences: "Jesus doesn't *really* mean we won't be in the kingdom if we prioritize possessions, work, and family." But Jesus is dead serious. So serious, he says "none" will even "taste" his banquet. **Consumer Christianity cheapens discipleship by selling tickets to heaven but true Christianity charges full price to Christ—your life or nothing.** And this is not just for the religious. Jesus turns to the *crowds*: "[If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple](#)" (26). The call to the Pharisees is the call to the crowd. *He thins the crowds with a thick discipleship*, laying down three layers of cost: family, Self, cross. This hate isn't virulent but it is meant to be visceral. It's a hatred of comparison. Comparison to what? To our love for Christ. When push comes to shove, we have to choose Christ over family. This happens all the time in non-Christianized countries. When I was working Asia, we met former Buddhists who were completely ostracized by their family because of their faith in Christ. This does not mean that we ostracize family, like many young Christians do in self-righteous zeal, *only that family may ostracize us*. The love of God in Christ compels us to invite *all* to the table, but it does not permit us to replace the host. And if we love our new family in Christ, we will remind them of the words of the host, difficult, costly things like: "Don't be unequally yoked. Flee youthful lusts. Man was made for the Sabbath. The gospel for the poor." Why? Because we're better? Oh no, because *Christ* is better. Better than the attention of a guy, the thrill of porn, significance of work, the love of a friend, the comfort of the city. And our reluctance to do this is embedded in the second cost, **hate yourself**. Now this cost is very off putting in a therapeutic culture, a culture of "love yourself." The love yourself culture is everywhere. If you're facing a dilemma—what job to

take, what kind of person to date, what religion to follow, it's common for people to say, "Hey, it doesn't matter what you do as long as you do what you love." "To thine own Self be true." But what if your Self isn't true? What if your assessment of what's good and true is off? What if there are actually people you shouldn't date, jobs you shouldn't take, and religions that are wrong? Do what you love? The addict does what he loves and ruins his life. The adulterer does what she loves and ruins her marriage. Hitler did what he loved and ruined a continent. Each of these needed to hate, not love, something about themselves. The solution isn't to love yourself or do what you love because Self is actually part of the problem. St. Augustine described sin as curving in on yourself. What did he mean? That your love terminates on Self not on God. It does not work. Know why? We were made for another world, to open up not curve in, to receive love from an Extraordinary place not an ordinary source. A person that sees us just as we are, doesn't paper over our faults or blow smoke, and loves us still. Love God and you gain the kingdom. Love yourself, lose the kingdom. The third cost is the **cross**: "[Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple](#)" (27). What does it mean to "take up your cross"? In the Roman Empire criminals carried a cross to their execution as a public expression of *submission* to the state. The law was broken but order has been restored. So, when we take up our cross we submit to God's kingdom. We prioritize his order. We renounce the reign of Self for the reign of Christ, permitting him to reorder our lives however he sees fit. Death to Self; Life in Christ, every single day. Bonhoeffer: "**Every command of Jesus is a call to die.**" In each command of Christ we have a choice—submission to Self or submission to the Savior. Who's more loving? Who's more true? Discipleship is a declaration of allegiance not a vow of poverty, though it might lead to simplicity, poverty, or death like it did the early Christians or our Burmese brothers and sisters. Discipleship is *costly*. I recently read about a group of church leaders in the Chinese underground church. As leaders huddled up for prayer and training, one pastor stood watch at the door to warn them in case they were attacked by state police. They began to tell stories. One pastor wept as he recounted story after story of people in his church being kidnapped, tortured, and tongues cut out by a cult. Another leader described how the government threatened to take everything away from her people if they didn't stop studying the Bible. After an hour there was a circle of tears on the floor. And we struggle to get to church, to make a discipleship meeting every two weeks, to serve the poor, to share our faith, while people are literally dying to get to church. The tyranny of Self is upon us, and we must hate it, throw off its rule, and embrace the reign of Christ. Only then will the reordering grace of God result in vibrant public witness. We must repent of the kingdom of comfort and return to the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of the cross. When Christ calls a man, he bids he come and die. George Muller: "The will of God is to have no will of your own." Jesus: [Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.](#) The cross is a life-defining mantra we come back to again and again. Now, if you've been around gospel ministry for a while, you might object by saying, "I don't have to take my "own" cross because Jesus took the cross for me." But that's not what Jesus says; it's a misunderstanding of the gospel. The "no cross" view of Christianity jettisons Jesus as Lord only to take him as Christ. Savior but no King. Christ but no Lord. It would split Jesus in two. But that is not the Jesus of history; the God of glory. He is both Lord and Christ. Savior and King. As king, he calls us to come and die, as Christ he shows us the way. As Lord he issues commands, as Savior he keeps the commands. As king he

ordains suffering but as Christ he bends it into joy. As Lord he calls the shots, as Christ he takes the shots. We must keep Lord and Christ together or we have no Jesus at all.

Costly Grace

Costly excuses, costly discipleship, now costly grace, which is why it is actually wise to follow Jesus. Because unlike Rome, the kingdom of God isn't based on brute force but on benevolent grace. Unlike Caesar, Christ does what he commands. Jesus takes up the cross, and does it in a way that no one else can. The cross is example, yes, but it is also foundational for a whole new world. The cross gives us an expiration date; the empty tomb a resurrection date. And in Christ, both happen at once. By renouncing Self and faith in the Savior, we die and rise again in shimmering, resurrection dignity to become children of God. How? He takes the place of the criminal to rise the Victor. He suffers rejection for our acceptance. He swallows death so we can have life. He takes judgment so we can take grace. But you must come after him. You must take up your cross. **Every command of Jesus is a call to die and every promise a pledge to live.** There is reward in the resurrection and feasting in the kingdom, but only with the cross of Christ. This discipleship is not what Bonhoeffer calls "cheap grace." **Cheap grace, he says, is the grace or love we bestow on ourselves. We need a grace and love bestowed on us. Cheap grace is love of Self in place of the love of God. Cheap grace is do what you love not what God loves. Cheap grace is forgiveness without obedience, confession without repentance, discipleship without cost. Cheap grace cuts Jesus in two.** But costly grace sees him whole, fears him, follows him, obeys him because Christ is all. What kind of grace do you want? Costly grace or cheap grace? What you are you willing to pay? A life of comfort? Mere church attendance. Cheap grace. Your life, costly grace. We must decide, not just once but every day for a lifetime (verbs are continual). But it is grace that we would know him. *What we are willing to pay does not procure grace, it only proves it.* This is no ordinary love; it is an extraordinary God. Let's take up our cross, renounce costly excuses in view of costly grace for costly, priceless, Christ-adoring discipleship.